

THOSE TRULY AMAZING BEADCATS!

Virginia Blakelock & Carol Perrenoud - www.beadcats.com

...Jenny Dowde on Workshop Visitors to Australia in 2010...



When reading about Virginia Blakelock and Carol Perrenoud, you would be forgiven for thinking that because of their various achievements and lofty standing in the beading world they belong on pedestals far beyond the reach of you and me. Pedestals would in fact be deserved. They are remarkably talented women and highly respected around the world. But luckily for us they are really down to earth and approachable and as fair dinkum as they come!

I first met Virginia, her husband Gary Betts and Carol back in 1996 when I attended their beading workshop at a Mittagong FORUM held at Frensham school. The class was FUN-tastic even for a brand new beader like me. I had such a great time with them that on learning they had a week to fill in before heading to Canberra, I kidnapped all three and took them home. That they were kindred spirits was reinforced immediately when the cramped accommodation (our house is really a shoebox), makeshift beds or the fact they had to share space with our menagerie didn't faze them in the least.

It was a laugh-a-minute week, with sight-seeing and shopping taking precedence. Akubras, didgeridoos and drizabone coats were high on the list – they love ALL things Australian, having fallen head over heels for this country upon arrival. In fact when communicating with them during the writing of this article I received the following comment: "We are all OZ-a-philes and from our very first trip were amazed at the floral and fauna (if it doesn't kill you) and the incredibly wonderful down to earth Aussie people."

And of our approach to textiles they added, "...there is no shame in being wild and crazy in the fiber world in Australia, which is so refreshing to us...."

In fact the Beadcats have become such devoted Oz-a-philes that they came back in 2001 and 2002, which will make April 2010 their fourth trip Downunder. I'm sure it won't be the last.

So where did the beading journey begin for these women?

Virginia taught herself to loom weave in the 1960's and later, as a teenager, spent four years in Pakistan where she discovered Asian design. Her time in Pakistan served to strengthen her love of beads and while her interest in drawing and painting led to a Bachelor's Degree in Fine Arts from Ohio's Wright State University, it was her love of beads that was to be her driving force. She discovered and purchased a collection of beads at a rummage sale and her path was set.



After graduating from University she continued to paint, but on discovering that first collection of beads and working on a hunch, she designed a geometric pattern, made herself a loom similar to the one she learnt on and wove a piece that was completely different to the North American designs which were so prevalent at that time. Her hunch paid off and it was the designs inspired by her fine art training that were to become her signature work.

For the next seven years she and husband Gary Betts lived in a cabin in the Oregon wilderness where she continued to bead her own designs and work with Gary in his concrete construction business.

Enter Carol Perrenoud... Carol's love of beads began in childhood after discovering her grandmother's impressive collection. Her passion for nature led her to a degree in Zoology and, as an accomplished seamstress at the time of meeting Virginia, she was able to source and supply her with a large variety of threads. In 1985 while visiting Virginia and Gary in Oregon, Carol was invited to stay on. The rest as they say, is history.

In 1986, at Virginia's insistence, Carol accompanied her to Virginia's first loom weaving workshop in Portland, Oregon, for "moral support". At Carol's suggestion, unwanted beads were packaged up to sell to the students, and because Virginia didn't want her students to have to take notes all weekend, she (Virginia) prepared a 50 page handout for them.